BELAIR AT BOWIE, MARYLAND
Belair at Bowie, Maryland
Bowie
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS MD-1253
MD-1253

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BELAIR AT BOWIE, MARYLAND

HABS No. MD-1253

NOTE: Please see the following historical reports for additional information about the history of Belair at Bowie, Maryland:

12418 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1254
12420 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1255
12408 Stonehaven Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1257
12500 Swirl Lane (The Colonial, 4 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1260
12100 Tulip Grove Drive (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1263
12400 Shadow Lane (The Colonial, 3 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1264
Belair Bath & Tennis Club	HABS No. MD-1265
12401 Sussex Lane (The Manor House)	HABS No. MD-1267
12405 Sussex Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1269
12413 Salem Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1270
12406 Skylark Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1271

Location: "Belair at Bowie, Maryland," Bowie, Prince Georges County, Maryland.

Significance: In December 1957, the nationally and internationally renowned residential construction firm of Levitt and Sons announced its intention to build a fourth major postwar community on the former Woodward estate, which was located in Maryland on the metropolitan fringe of Washington, D.C. In the decade that followed, the firm oversaw the transformation of farm and pasture into an entirely new town that was wholly suburban in character.

"Belair at Bowie, Maryland," the name under which the venture was developed and marketed, emerged from more than a decade's experience in mass housing by a firm whose name and identity were synonymous with residential construction and community building.[1] Most of the construction methods and marketing strategies associated with Levitt and Sons were being developed and refined by builders throughout the country. Yet, the firm's massive scale of operations and high level of vertical integration set it apart from its peers to such an extent that Levitt and Sons and its three Levittowns came to be representative of the shape and structure of the building industry as a whole.

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[1] In this study, "Belair" will be used when referring to Levitt and Sons's development, which (since 1963) is located within the City of Bowie. Early residents referred to their core community as "Belair" or "Belair-Bowie" to distinguish it from Huntington or "Old Bowie." Over time, the universal term "Bowie" has become nearly ubiquitous when speaking of the entire jurisdiction—Old Bowie, the core of Levitt neighborhoods, and later developments and additions.

As with its three earlier postwar mega-developments, Levitt and Sons planned Belair as a complete bedroom community with provisions made for schools, churches, shopping centers, and recreation facilities. Although extending from experience and precedent set by the Levittowns, the company remained adamant that Belair "will not become another Levittown," communities which, by the late 1950s, had come to be predominantly, and not always positively, associated with the middle-income working class.[2] With Belair, Levitt and Sons completed a process started at Levittown, New Jersey—the creation of a community that was entirely directed to middle-class consumers. Relying on the cornerstones of its business acumen—the close and frequent scrutiny of their primary products (the house models), expansive marketing campaigns, and the ability to offer more house at less cost through high-volume building—Levitt and Sons provided white-collar Washingtonians with a unique and appealing option within the regional housing market, an option ultimately taken by thousands of middle-class households in the national capital region.

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Description: Sections of single-family houses in Belair at Bowie, Maryland, were constructed in overlapping stages between 1960 and 1968. All of the street names within a given section begin with the same first letter as the section and are generally the only indicator of movement between them. The earliest sections (Somerset, Buckingham, Kenilworth, Foxhill, and Tulip Grove) were completed between 1960 and 1964 and are located on land circumscribed by U. S. Route 50 (John Hanson Highway) on the south; Maryland Route 197 (Collington Road) on the west; Maryland Route 450 (Annapolis Road) on the north; and Maryland Route 3 (Crain Highway) on the east. The Levitt development approximately fills the western two-thirds of this precinct, although the major internal artery, Belair Drive, in this part of the community extends all the way east to MD Route 3. A more linear residential section (Long Ridge, 1964-65) backs up to MD Route 197 on its west side and is the only fully-completed Levitt section on this side of the road.[3] Dating from 1965, "Heather Hills" is the only section of Belair located south of U. S. Route 50. Although smaller than the other sections, it still has its own elementary school because it lacks direct vehicular connection to the rest of Belair; a relatively new pedestrian bridge provides foot and bike access across Route 50.

More than half of Belair is situated north of Maryland Route 450 and east of Maryland Route 197, extending to the northeast from their intersection. These sections (Meadowbrook, Chapel Forge, Whitehall, Rockledge, Overbrook, Yorktown, Idlewild,

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[2] Hal Willard, "Levitt's Belair Homes Will Be Ready in '60," *The Washington Post* 14 Dec. 1957, sec. D: 1, for quote.

[3] A small segment of Galaxy Lane, located northwest of the intersection of MD Routes 197 and 450, contains Levitt houses. The rest of the neighborhood dates from much later. There are no other "G" sections in Belair, and it is not known why this area was not fully filled out in the 1960s.

and Victoria Heights) were realized between 1964 and 1968 and are filled with the last of Belair's detached, single-family houses. As with Levitt and Sons's other major postwar developments, Belair was planned with a principal commercial node, realized in phases and located on both sides of Route 450 at the community's eastern boundary. Two groupings of townhouses, numbering approximately three-hundred units in total, flank the stores on the north side of Route 450. Known as Belair Town I and Belair Town II, these were built in two campaigns between 1968 and 1970.[4]

History: When Belair at Bowie, Maryland, opened for sales in October 1960, "Levitt" and "Levittown" had become household names in the United States. Levitt and Sons had created a reputation for mass-building with the much-publicized expansion Cape Cods and one-story Levittowners built, respectively, at Levittown, New York (1947-51), and Pennsylvania (1952-57). Each included approximately 17,000 houses for mainly middle-income, working-class households. Acknowledging sustained demand for even larger and more amenity-filled dwellings, the company's third mega-development—started in 1958 at Levittown (later Willingboro), New Jersey (completed with about 15,000 houses)—provided the an initial foray into more expensive houses intended for a somewhat more affluent clientele. Levitt and Sons fine-tuned and expanded its New Jersey model offerings while planning Belair and the development ultimately became the firm's first venture since World War II that could be appropriately labeled "middle class."

While the Levitt firm has been given a disproportionate amount of credit for revolutionizing how houses were constructed and sold in the decades following World War II, the company, in particular its president William Levitt, did become the quasi-heroic and popular face for the burgeoning postwar housing industry. Perhaps more extraordinary, the firm's massive Levittown communities—built on a scale having only a scattering of rivals across the nation and decidedly atypical for the period—have problematically become a stand-in for all postwar residential development in the American suburbs. Still, Levitt and Sons was legendary in its time and remains so today, and the public perception of its influence is in all likelihood of greater historical significance than its actual impact on the industry.

At Levittown, New York, the company drew on insights gained through wartime defense-housing construction, adapting assembly-line production concepts to site-built houses.[5] Company president, William Levitt, retrospectively explained the process in 1964: "[the] success of our system depended on the most minute breakdown of operations. Those twenty-six construction operations, starting with digging house footings and ending with painting the exterior trim, were subdivided into simple standardized steps, each handled

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[4] See "Belair Town Gets First Occupants," *The Washington Post* 26 Oct. 1968, sec. D: 8.

[5] In 1966, a *Washington Post* article still discussed the Levitt and Sons' operations as an adaptation of mass, assembly-line production of automobiles. See Leroy Aarone, "Levitt and Sons: A General Motors in Brick and Nails," *The Washington Post* 13 Nov. 1966, sec. K: 2.

by a specifically trained crew."[6] Levitt and Sons further streamlined its operations and replicated its earlier community-building pace with Levittown, Pennsylvania.[7] The success of this development validated a national reputation for innovative, mass residential planning and construction as well as the business prowess of William Levitt, the firm's public persona.[8]

The company purchased the 2,226-acre Belair tract from the Woodward estate for $1,750,000 in August 1957.[9] William Levitt publicly announced development plans for the acreage in December, maintaining that "custom and precedence will dictate what we do in Maryland," a coded statement of assurance to prospective buyers that Belair would be segregated venture.[10] Levitt and Sons's refused to sell new houses at Belair to black buyers for nearly its entire development, using the widespread justification expressed by builders across the nation—integrated neighborhoods and subdivisons would drive away potential (white) customers and, because of this, would be "economic suicide."[11] That such a policy was being implemented at the height of the civil rights movement meant that the community became a logical target for periodic protests about unfair housing practices.[12] An open housing law passed by Prince Georges County, Maryland, in 1967,

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[6] William J. Levitt, "A House Is Not Enough: The Story of America's First Community Builder," in *Business Decisions That Changed Our Lives*, ed. Sidney Furst and Milton Sherman (New York: Random House, 1964), 66. See also Alfred S. Levitt, "A Community Builder Looks at Community Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 17 (Spring 1951): 81, and "Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," *Time* 3 Jul. 1950: 70-71.

[7] See "Technology: The Most House for the Money," *Fortune* 46 (Oct. 1952): 150-156+.

[8] Founded by patriarch Abraham Levitt in 1929, "Levitt and Sons" ultimately drew in both William Levitt and his brother Alfred. Up to and including the launching of Levittown, Pennsylvania, William was mainly depicted as managing the business side of the company with Alfred concentrating on planning and design. By the development of the third Levittown, Alfred had sold his interest in the company, apparently because "they could not develop a method for making decisions jointly." Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (1967) (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 5.

[9] The centerpiece of this estate was Belair Mansion, a Georgian country house built by Governor Samuel Ogle ca. 1745 and expanded by the Woodward family early in the twentieth century. Levitt and Sons had long been attracted to former estates for many of its housing developments, and it would have known about Belair's potential sale because of a society death and ensuing scandal. In 1955, William Woodward, owner of the Belair estate, known for its champion horses, was shot and killed by his wife, Ann; she never faced trial as a grand jury ruled the death an accident. Levitt might have even taken a greater interest in the high-profile event since he and his family resided in the former Long Island estate of William Woodward's mother. A series of essays on various aspects of the history of Levitt-era Bowie produced by graduate students in the American Studies Department of George Washington University (2000) are available at the Bowie Museum Archives at Belair, Bowie, Maryland.

[10] John A. Chiles, "Levitt's Belair Project Will Cost $100 Million," *The Evening Star* (Washington) 8 Dec. 1957: 1.

[11] Alan Lupe, "The Changing Face of Bowie," *The Sun* (Baltimore) 9 Oct. 1963, sec. D: 11.

[12] Ibid. See also "Builder Levitt Accused of Bias in Home Sales," *The Washington Post* 15 Jul. 1961, sec. C: 1; Wallace Terry, "Suit Urged to End Racial Barriers in Housing at Belair," *The Washington*

together with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and establishment of the Fair Housing Act as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, both occurring in April 1968, forced Levitt and Sons to sell new Belair houses to qualified black buyers.[13] While monumental in a broader view, the legislation offered a somewhat hollow victory with regard to Belair since the company had nearly finished up the construction and sales of new houses at the development by the time legislation was passed.

From the outset, Levitt and Sons conceived of Belair as a smaller scale venture than the Levittowns. It was initially planned for 4,500 houses, which undoubtedly reflected both slower-than-expected sales at Levittown, New Jersey, as well as probable unfamiliarity with the national capital market.[14] The bulk of its initial merchandising and advertising for Belair focused on the individual house models rather than on the community as a whole, a decision born both out of uncertainty about the overall economy and housing market, but also because high-value Levitt houses had always been the company's most potent attraction. Indeed, interest in Belair's houses and a steady progression of sales led to the creation of additional sections in the subdivision, which was eventually completed with about 7,500 houses.[15] Although the absolute increase in total houses is impressive, perhaps more so is the fact that nearly all the models available in 1968 were the essentially the same ones used to launch the endeavor in 1960; the eight-year period was a relatively long span at a time of rapid evolution in the design of new American houses.

Levitt and Sons opened sales at Belair in October 1960 with eight furnished display houses representing the six models planned for the development: two variations each of The Cape Cod and The Rancher, and one each of the three- and four-bedroom options for The Colonial, The Country Clubber, and The Manor House.[16] Although such model names as the The Cape Cod and The Colonial were significant improvements over

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Post 21 Apr. 1963, sec. B: 10; and Donald L. Hymes, "17 CORE Demonstrators Convicted in 30 Minutes for Sit-Ins at Belair," *The Washington Post* 14 Feb. 1964, Sec. B: 1.

[13] Bart Barnes, "Levitt Drops Sales Ban to Subdivision Negroes," *The Washington Post* 10 Apr. 1968, sec. B: 1.

[14] John B. Willmann, "He's Halfway Home at Belair," *The Washington Post* 11 Apr. 1964, sec. C: 1, for projected number of houses in Belair.

[15] John B. Willman, "Levitt to Build a New 'Village'," *The Washington Post* 10 Feb. 1968, sec. E: 1, for total number of houses in Belair.

[16] "Manor House Opens Today," *The Washington Post* 18 Feb. 1961, sec. B: 12. A *Washington Post* feature on 1 Oct. 1960 included a photograph of a seemingly completed Manor House; however, it appears that, for a presently unknown reason, the model was not opened to the public until five months later. Indecision about whether to actually put the model into production at Belair might have been the cause of the delay. The company had stopped taking orders for the model by the time that the first residents of Belair occupied their houses in October 1961. During the last year of development, Levitt and Sons began offering a modest, new one-story model "intended to attract newly married couples and people of retirement age." A furnished display house was constructed at the exhibit and sales center on Sussex Drive. "New Levitt Model," *Post* 13 May 1967, sec. C: 34.

Levittown, New Jersey's House A and House C, the no-nonsense descriptor-names initially used for the Belair models were entirely abandoned in 1964 in favor of ones that were more evocative and probably of greater use to marketing. The new names took cues from the Anglo-sounding section names: The Cape Cod became The Ardsley; The Rancher became The Buckingham (also a section name); the three-bedroom version of The Colonial became The Cambridge, and the four-bedroom version became The Gladstone; and The Country Clubber became The Framingham. Keeping to the theme, the variation of The Buckingham with a separate family room offered after 1963 was called The Devon and the small one-story model only available in 1967-68 was named The Kensington.

Levitt and Sons lined the south side of Sussex Lane with the furnished models in an approximation of a future street in Belair. The display houses faced north across an expansive lawn, creating a three-dimensional billboard for cars traveling along Route 450. The six original models ranged in price from $14,990 to $27,500, and in size from 1,400 to 2,508 square feet, comfortably above an approximate national average of 1,350.[17] At a time when three bedrooms were by far the standard, four of the Belair models had four, a feature offered in only a fifth of new American houses at the time.[18] All of the models contained at least two full bathrooms, which appeared in about half of all new houses in 1963.[19] Every dwelling included an enclosed garage, a laundry area separate from the kitchen, and, notably, central air conditioning at a time when only a fifth of new houses in the United States included this luxurious amenity.[20]

In October 1960, *The Washington Post* described the models as "roomy, basically simple, well-planned, sturdy, and in the Levitt tradition of maximum living space per dollar—minus extras or frills."[21] Despite this perception, Levitt and Sons had devised models that incorporated many of the latest trends in American housing. The houses sold at Belair not only met or exceeded most national averages, but also addressed the elevated expectations for housing in metropolitan Washington. Although positioned roughly equidistant between Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis, Belair ultimately became a bedroom community principally for people working in Washington and its immediate vicinity.[22] When launched, Belair was the largest development ever attempted in one of

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[17] "New Marketing Trends: The Case of Bill Levitt," *House & Home* 19 (Jan. 1961): 180.

[18] U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *New One-family Homes Sold and for Sale, 1963 to 1967* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 15.

[19] Ibid, 16.

[20] Ibid., 17.

[21] John B. Willmann, "Levitt Ready to Unveil His Belair," *The Washington Post* 1 Oct. 1960, sec. B: 1.

[22] See "Many Owners at Belair Are Federal Employees," *The Washington Post* 24 Jul. 1965, sec. E: 11. Interviews and survey forms completed by some original Belair residents also indicated that most people buying at Belair had previously lived in or near Washington.

the more pricey housing markets in the country and was an immediate success. In an effort to explain his own surprise with the unanticipated pace of early sales, William Levitt simply concluded: "the public is 'value-starved'."[23] Levitt staff architects used a palette of neo-traditional street elevations to face the roomy, fully equipped houses at Belair.[24] Colonial Revival design had never fallen out of favor in postwar Washington, and Levitt and Sons's decision to use mostly traditional front elevations for the new product line fit well within expectations for the Washington region. The Belair houses were value packed because they were competitive in terms of size, room number, and amenities, but considerably less expensive than comparable new dwellings elsewhere in suburban Washington. An October 1960 *The Evening Star* (Washington) article observed that at Belair "the announced price per square foot of space is doubtless the lowest anywhere in the Washington area," yet this value did not occur "at the expense of design."[25] Belair's models included many and in some cases all of the "best-seller features" for the Washington area listed in a 1960 issue of the trade journal *House & Home*, including: "an attractive entryway," " a separate dining room," "a second living area," and "spacious rooms."[26]

During the early period of sales, construction, and occupancy, Belair was overwhelmingly defined by its houses as very little else existed at the time in Belair; however, the community eventually received some of the amenities that were also marketed elements of Levitt's postwar developments. In order to economically acquire a large tract of land, Belair was located beyond the outer edge of metropolitan sprawl in what was then an agricultural landscape. As one early Belair resident commented about the early days: "there was nothing in Bowie."[27] In order to attract buyers, Levitt and Sons had to sell an entire community, not just affordable houses. As with the Levittowns, the company planned Belair as a "complete" venture with provisions for recreation, schools, churches, and shopping, all of which was precisely located by the firm down to the pattern of model type and house color along its residential streets. Although the construction of primary and middle schools and basic shopping facilities by necessity followed closely on the houses, it would take the better part of a decade to steadily realize the additional schools, houses of worship, public library, Levitt-sponsored and non-Levitt commercial outlets and centers, professional offices, and a scattering of private swim clubs, all of which were laid-out in Levitt and Sons's overall concept for Belair.[28] These

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[23] "Public Value-Starved, Builder Levitt Claims," *The Los Angeles Times* 18 Oct. 1960, part 1: 4.

[24] The only exception to the traditional form and detailing that otherwise dominated in Belair was the "modern" option among the four Country Clubber facade variations. The option apparently did not appeal to the metro-Washington buyers since they discontinued it after the construction of the first three sections.

[25] Robert J. Lewis, "Levitt Exhibit Opens," *The Evening Star* 8 Oct. 1960, sec. B: 1.

[26] "This Chart Tells You 'the Best-seller Features' in 25 Cities," *House & Home* 18 (Jul. 1960): 155.

[27] Margo Kyle-Keith, telephone interview with James A. Jacobs, 7 Mar. 2000.

institutions and establishments greatly enhanced the local quality of life, but, they also, perhaps more importantly, sustained a sense of community as Belair matured and the camaraderie characterizing its pioneering years began to wane. Belair's real and perceived geographic isolation has been progressively reduced as the Washington suburbs continue to push out from the center, residential development within the City of Bowie continues unabated, and, in great contrast to its Levitt-era state, the area becomes a regional shopping destination. The dwindling number of original Levitt buyers still living in Belair seem somewhat ambivalent about the continued growth. One has observed: "People saw [Belair] as an escape from the hectic world beyond. Bowie has changed recently, it is becoming less of a haven."[29] While perhaps "less of a haven," Bowie retains a strong sense of place and maintains an active interest in a history that, while seemingly quintessential for the postwar period, in actuality is exceptional for the region and, indeed, the nation as a whole.

Architect: John F. Sierks is the architect of record for at least four, and possibly all, of Belair's original models. Sierks received his degree in architecture from Pratt Institute in 1938 and began working for Levitt and Sons in 1948 when he was hired as the firm's chief architect.[30] At the time of the design of the 1961 Levitt models, Sierks still held this position and was working out of the company offices then located in Levittown, New Jersey, where Levitt and Sons employed an entire division of architects, landscape architects, engineers, and draftsmen to design and plan everything from the houses and utility networks to the location of trees and shopping centers. The company also made

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[28] Belair was an undeniably suburban confection, and as construction wrapped up at the end of the 1960s, Levitt and Sons pursued new ventures in the area both similar to and quite distinct from the core community. In an obvious nod to the then rapidly growing and nationally influential new towns of Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland—both also within the orbit of the national capital—Levitt and Sons and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission announced plans for a master plan for Bowie that included a "New Town Center." With the concept formalized in 1969, the master plan designated the commercial area along Route 450 an "urban living area," with plans to increase the density of housing in areas immediately adjacent to the existing shopping plazas. Future commercial and retail space would not be constructed along what had become Belair's "main street," but rather in a "two level shopping mall with three department stores" in the New Town Center that was to be the flagship of "regional commercial activity" in the area. Although not part of the original concept for Belair, an "urban center" idea for the development seems to have been under consideration by Levitt and Sons since at least the early 1960s. Despite a warm reception and initial burst of activity for implementation of the New Town Center portion of the master plan, little beyond some residential construction and a professional building was ever realized, in part because of the takeover of Levitt and Sons by the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation officially beginning in 1968, but moving rapidly forward early in the 1970s. Martin Rize, personal interview with James A. Jacobs, 8 Mar. 2000; "The New Master Plan," *The Bowie Blade* 11 Dec. 1969: 4; Levitt and Sons, Incorporated, "Bowie, Maryland New Town Center" c1971, mss. Bowie Museum files; Donald A. Westcott, "Bowie New Town Center—Presentation," c1971, tss. in Bowie Museum files, A-63; "Levitt's Repurchase Brightens NTC Outlook," *The Bowie Blade* 21 Feb. 1974: 1.

[29] Michael Whalen, telephone interview with James A. Jacobs, 3 Mar. 2000.

[30] "Sierks, John F.," *American Architects Directory*, ed. George S. Koyl (New York: R. R. Bowker for the American Institute of Architects, 1962), 642. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Sierks's career is drawn from this source.

these employees available to religious denominations and local governments for consultation purposes in developing worship and educational facilities constructed within Levitt communities.[31]

The exact size of the architectural staff employed by Levitt and Sons around this time is not known; however, given Sierks's position of "chief architect," the number of residential projects then under construction or development, and the level of vertical integration within the company, there were probably a number of architects working under him. In such an office environment, there was probably a degree of collaboration on any one of the designs. The trade journal *House & Home* reflected this type of environment by noting in September 1959 that "Levitt Staff" designed the new Rancher and in November 1960 that "Levitt staff architects" had produced the design for the featured Country Clubber model.[32] As is the case in many architectural offices, a partner or senior staff member frequently receives individual credit for a group effort, which might explain *American Home* magazine's subsequent attribution of The Country Clubber to Sierks alone in its February 1962 issue.[33] Indeed, *The Evening Star* (Washington) reported in 1963, "[the] Five different models…being offered at Belair…[are] Built to the design of Architect John F. Sierks…"[34] Sierks was also frequently mentioned as the "chief architect" in newspaper articles about the features of or changes to Belair's models, suggesting that regardless of the creative process, he was the most knowledgeable about and ultimately responsible for their design.[35]

Interestingly, John Sierks's name seems to be more frequently affixed to the Levitt models after 1960, likely an inadvertent trend, but one that may actually stem from a difficult moment for the company. Although providing above-average amenities, Levitt and Sons's was not adventurous in its house design. Generally, the firm introduced new features by tinkering with existing models. Because of this approach, the company was for the most part able to avoid the serious market failure of one of its models. When planning Levittown, New Jersey, Levitt and Sons reconsidered most aspects of its existing development formula and, in the process, solicited residential designs from "two world-famous architects."[36] The houses they produced would have been prohibitively expensive to construct and, in the end, the company had to fully rely on its in-house team, headed by John Sierks. Although using existing Levitt models as a point of departure, the new versions were subject to a greater amount of reconsideration than usual, and the

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[31] Martin Rize, personal interview with James A. Jacobs, 8 Mar. 2000.

[32] "Good Ideas in Multi-level Planning," *House & Home* 18 (Nov. 1960): 110.

[33] "Here's Good Suburban Living at Low Cost," *American Home* 65 (Feb. 1962): 25.

[34] "Levitt Shows Belair at Bowie," *The Evening Star* 13 Sep. 1963, sec. C: 14.

[35] For examples, see "Ranch Model Is Enlarged," *Post* 21 Mar. 1964, sec E: 11, and "Belair Homes Designed for Patio Access," *The Washington Post* 7 Aug. 1965, sec. E: 11.

[36] Gans, 10. The identity of the architects was not revealed by Gans.

company felt in the end that it had three salable designs. Only one year after the new Levittown opened, poor sales of the one-story model, known simply as House B, had prompted at least one round of design changes before being dropped entirely; the wholesale replacement of House B was a rare admittance of failure by Levitt and Sons.[37]

It is hard to pinpoint exactly why the one-story House B did not interest the public as there is nothing glaringly problematic in its design. Merely having a nice, but unremarkable plan and street elevation seems to have been enough, though. Faced with the need to redesign one-third of the Levitt product line only a year into sales and construction, the company's executives may have turned elsewhere. A February 1961 article in *American Home* entitled "Our New Guide to Good House Buys," featured House B's replacement at Levittown, New Jersey, and noted that its architect was Lester H. Weckesser. Weckesser was a licensed architect who specialized in designs for high volume custom builders, in particular successful New Jersey builder Bob Scarborough.[38] Given Weckesser's location in nearby Haddonfield, New Jersey, and his association with upper-end speculative design, it is not inconceivable that Levitt and Sons may have contracted with him for a new prototype. If *American Home* was not merely mistaken in its attribution, then Weckesser may have signed over all creative rights to the design since the "Levitt Staff" was listed as the designer by *House & Home* in September 1959 and Sierks was noted as the model's designer in June 1961 when it won a Merit Award from *House & Home* among all merchant-built houses in the "under $15,000 class."[39] Conversely, as Levitt and Sons also received a second Merit Award from the same trade publication for the three-bedroom version of The Colonial, *House & Home* may have just assumed that Sierks was the architect for both because he was the company's chief architect. All things considered, Sierks, undoubtedly, was wholly involved with the design of and alterations to all of Belair's houses over its decade of planning and development.

It should be noted that in addition to The Rancher and the three-bedroom version of The Colonial, The Country Clubber was also the source of at least two more design awards for Levitt and Sons. In January 1961, *The Washington Post* reported that *House & Home* gave The Country Clubber an "Award of Merit in residential design and construction."[40] Later that year, the National Association of Home Builders also gave the model "a first

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[37] "Look How Bill Levitt Is Meeting the Changing Market: More House, More Money, More Value," *House & Home* 16 (Sep. 1959): 138-140.

[38] Ann Marie T. Cammarota, *Pavements in the Garden: The Suburbanization of Southern New* Jersey (Madison, WI: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 171.

[39] "This Year's Merchant-built Winners: The Best Now Set a Very High Standard," *House & Home* 18 (Jun. 1961): 150. The award was only for the model as constructed at Levittown, New Jersey, which was priced at $13,990; the same house at Belair cost $2000 more. The model's plan differed slightly than the one reproduced in *American Home* as the laundry facilities were moved and this change, perhaps, also accounts for the difference in attribution.

[40] "Levitt Model Given Honor by Magazine," *The Washington Post* 21 Jan. 1961, sec. D: 6.

prize" at their annual convention because it had been "chosen as 'best for the money' in the South in the annual competition sponsored by *American Home* magazine."[41] The awards given to Levitt models generally focused on their great value and efficient planning. These two characteristics were the bedrock of the company's direction, success, and national influence and were greatly underpinned by the effort and creativity of John Sierks and his staff.

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